

Eight Precepts in Theravada Buddhism

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“The minimum requirements for a Theravada Buddhist are the Five Precepts (*Panca Sila*).

Theravada Buddhism also offers two different versions of the Eight Precepts:

(i) *Atthangika Uposatha Sila* (Eight *Uposatha* Precepts)

(ii) *Ajivatthamaka Sila* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth)

The Eight Precepts are observed on the *Uposatha* Days (full moon, new moon and the two half-moon days). Lay people often wear white clothes and spend entire *Uposatha* days at the temple. Before the day's activities begin, the presiding monk administers the Eight Precepts and after the day's religious activities are over, administers the Five Precepts, thus releasing the devotee from the Eight Precepts.

(i) *Atthangika Uposatha Sila* (Eight *Uposatha* Precepts)

1. *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings;

2. *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given;

3. *Abrahmacariya veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from non-celibate conduct;

4. *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech

5. *Sura – meraya – majja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from drugs and drink which tend to cloud the mind;

6. *Vikala bhojana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking food at an unseasonable time;

7. *Nacca – gita – vadita – visuka – dassana – mala - gandha vilepana - dharana mandana vibhusanatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from dancing, singing, music, and unseemly shows; from the use of garlands, perfumes, and unguents; and from things that tend to beautify and adorn [the person];

8. *Ucchasayana – mahasayana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from using high and luxurious seats and beds.

(ii) *Ajivatthamaka Sila* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth)

1. *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings;

2. *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given;

3. *Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from sexual misconduct;

4. *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech;

5. *Pisuna vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from backbiting;

6. *Pharusa vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from using harsh or abusive speech;

7. *Samphappalapa veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from useless or meaningless conversation;

8. *Micchajiva veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from wrong means of livelihood.

These precepts can also be taken on *Upasatha* days. In recent years the Sri Lankan Theravada Sangha (Buddhist monastic order) in the west have developed the use of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* precepts for western lay practitioners. Some westerners expressed a wish to undertake these as a lifetime commitment in a ceremony conducted by a senior monk.

J Gomes's article "The development and use of the Eight Precepts for lay practitioners, Upasakas and Upasikas in Theravada Buddhism in the West", is available on line at <https://www.tandfonline.com/> She would be grateful for anyone with relevant information to contact her...

An excellent book which also deals with these issues is *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Path of The Buddha* by Henepola Gunaratana, Wisdom."